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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Sharon's Disengagement Plan

Key stories in the media:

All media highlighted the Likud vote on PM Sharon's disengagement plan, which will take place on Sunday at polling places around the country. Maariv and Yediot carried similar headlines: "The Fight of His [Sharon's] Life." All media reported concerns that Israel will suffer a blow in the U.S. if Sharon fails. The right-wing Jewish-American group Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) publishes a full-page paid ad in Yediot: "The U.S. will continue to support Israel regardless of the referendum's results." All media reported that Sharon and his aides have launched a high-pressure offensive to shore up collapsing support in the party. Ha'aretz quoted senior Likud members as saying that only FM Silvan Shalom, Education Minister Limor Livnat and Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who only recently proclaimed their support for the plan, can save it. Leading media reported that Thursday Sharon told his close associates in Likud not to waste time thinking about the "day after" the referendum. However, commentators say that he is aware of the political consequences of a defeat. Some commentators believe that a national referendum is now needed -- Maariv also quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as voicing this opinion. Jerusalem Post notes that Sharon's allies have already begun fighting with each other amid polls predicting a setback:

Polls:

-A Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll conducted last night for Yediot finds that 47 percent of voters in the referendum are opposed to the plan (same as Wednesday); 40.5 percent support it (40.5 percent on Wednesday); -The Dialog Institute poll commissioned by Ha'aretz: 43 percent against the plan (40 percent on April 21); 36 percent for the plan (47 percent on April 21); 14 percent are undecided (13 percent on April 21). -A Globes poll shows a 1 percent edge in favor of the plan's opponents (46 to 45 percent).

Israel Radio reported that Quartet representatives (the United States' A/S William Burns, the EU's Marc Otte, the UN's Terje Roed-Larsen and a still unidentified Russian representative) will meet today at the U.S. Embassy in London to prepare a discussion on the situation of the road map. The talks precede a meeting in New York which AP says will be hosted by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on May 4, and is expected

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to be attended by the EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana, Russian FM Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Israel Radio reported that an audio tape purportedly from suspected Al-Qaida operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and broadcast on Al Arabiya-TV, said his group had intended to attack Jordanian intelligence, but that it denied the Jordanian government's accusation they planned a chemical attack. Israel Radio quoted Al-Zarqawi as saying that had Al Qaida possessed chemical weapons, it would not have hesitated using them against Israeli cities such as Tel Aviv or Eilat.

Leading media reported that Thursday the IDF admitted accidentally killing Dr. Yasser Abu Laimum, a lecturer in hospital management at the Arab-American University of Jenin, over the weekend.

Leading media reported that Jewish leaders "won a major victory" (Jerusalem Post) Thursday with the announcement by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that Israel's actions do not legitimize anti-Semitism. According to the Yediot correspondent at the Berlin conference, pressure from Muslim states resulted in the conference's final declaration condemning attacks motivated by religious hatred, without taking into account Muslim anti-Semitism and the new anti-Semitism's anti-Zionist character. Jerusalem Post and Hatzofe actually highlighted a sentence in the declaration which bears a different connotation: "Anti-Semitism, following its most devastating manifestation during the Holocaust, has assumed new forms and expressions, which along with other forms of intolerance, pose a threat to democracy, the values of civilization, and, therefore, to overall security in the OSCE region and beyond."

Israel Radio reported that Thursday the Defense Ministry and the U.S. Army successfully carried out a test of the joint Nautilus laser weapon project.

Maariv cited an announcement by Casablanca Mayor Mohamed Sajid that he will come to Tel Aviv in early May to attend the proclamation by UNESCO of the inclusion of Tel Aviv's Bauhaus buildings on its World Heritage List.

Ha'aretz reported that International Technologies Lasers (ITL), which is based in Rishon Lezion, has developed a device that can remotely detect explosives, drugs or other materials.

The media reported on the latest developments in Iraq and on the questioning of President Bush and Vice President Cheney by the September 11 commission.

Sharon's Disengagement Plan:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Those who support peace cannot be partners in a government that does not have the political power to take a hesitant step in the direction of peace."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "Anyone seeing Sharon struggling with the settlers and their rabbis, their religious rulings and their messianic fervor, has to rub his eyes."

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in Maariv: "Sharon deserves this: for the security fence, the erection of which he put off for so long; for the important secondary role he played in toppling Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas]; and for the corruption that has spread like a cancer."

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz: "Sharon has made the mistake which tripped up the greatest commanders in history -- underestimating the enemy."

Former minister of foreign affairs and former minister of defense Moshe Arens wrote in Ha'aretz: "Will rejection of the [disengagement] plan by the Likud membership cause a rift with the U.S.? Such a suggestion completely underestimates the strength and solidity of the U.S.-Israel relationship."

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Sharon's plan differs from Oslo in that it overtly calls for the destruction of Israeli communities.... In spite of Sharon's statements to the contrary, those who oppose the plan on its merits are not extremists. They are merely people who have learned from the past."

Nationalist Hatzofe editorialized: "Let us hope ... that a great majority of registered Likud voters will say 'no' to Ariel Sharon."

Block Quotes:

II. "The Referendum as a Turning Point"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (April 30): "Three days before the Likud referendum, opinion polls are showing an increasing erosion of support for the plan to disengage from the Gaza Strip and four

settlements in the northern West Bank.... Apparently the settlers' entreaty and the ideological fixation among many Likud members are counterbalanced by support for their leader and the support that the President of the United States granted Sharon's disengagement plan.... In recent days, however, those close to Sharon and the Prime Minister himself have started hinting that a vote by Likud members against the plan is equivalent to a vote of no confidence in the party chairman.... Attaching important ramifications to the disengagement initiative, in diplomatic, economic and security terms, has caused the referendum to become a critical test of the [government] coalition.... The Israeli political landscape after the referendum cannot be the same as it is now. Whatever the result, there will be significant repercussions within the internal power structure. Those who support the settlements cannot be partners in a government that disengages from the settlements. Those who support peace cannot be partners in a government that does not have the political power to take a hesitant step in the direction of peace."

II. "Only in Israel"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (April 30): "Up until now, only leaders of the left wing had become accustomed to such sights: appeals from the rabbis, a religious ruling by the doyen of the mystics, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's Saturday night sermon, thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jews at road junctions, flags, sandals, and women with their hair covered, and The Land of Israel for the Jewish People, and what is 'good for the Jews,' and demonstrations, and shouting, and women being dragged on the road, and threats. Yitzhak Rabin, until he was murdered, got to know this from personal experience. Shimon Peres knows it by heart. So does Ehud Barak. And now the melody returns. You, the composer, the originator and the first founder, Ariel Sharon. You of all people, this time, the lonely, battered man, facing this swelling tide almost alone, helpless, not knowing how or why, who or how many, from where it fell on you or where it is going. Anyone seeing Sharon struggling with the settlers and their rabbis, their religious rulings and their messianic fervor, has to rub his eyes.... The Prime Minister is in the middle of a maelstrom.... So what will he do? He could ignore the referendum (the Americans have been spreading hints to that effect in the past few days). He could submit the disengagement plan to the government and the Knesset. He could drop the plan temporarily... He could try to initiate elections by complex coalition maneuvers and other tricks. And most important, he can draw the appropriate conclusions and learn, by bitter experience, not to count his chickens before they are hatched."

III. "The Day After"

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in Maariv (April 30): "What kind of prime minister will Ariel Sharon be if he wakes up in 72 hours to a dawn of defeat in the Likud members' referendum on his disengagement plan?.... Sharon deserves this: for the security fence, the erection of which he put off for so long; for the important secondary role he played in toppling Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas]; and for the corruption that has spread like a cancer.... Sharon knows that were he to lose, he would have to resign. So would Ehud Olmert, as well as Defense Ministry Shaul Mofaz, who enlisted with such public valor in the campaign for disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Indeed, Mofaz won't be able to continue sending soldiers to [the isolated Gaza Strip settlement of] Netzarim and justify to the ears of bereaved parents the killing of their sons in Kfar Darom.... 'No' to disengagement constitutes a domestic disaster. It is a step toward a rift in the country that could bring mass legitimacy to refusal to serve in the IDF. Those who oppose [the plan] state in their propaganda: 'If you vote in favor, you get (Shimon) Peres.' They must be warned: 'If you oppose the plan, you get apartheid.' Israel will be isolated and forlorn for years, a leper in an anti-Semitic world that is yearning for this."

IV. "Last Call For Mr. Comeback"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz (April 30): "It's hard to believe our eyes with the polls on the Likud referendum. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the man who beat the Egyptians and locked up Yasser Arafat, who twice won elections and became the darling of the U.S. Administration, who stood steadfast in the face of terror attacks, crises and police interrogations, is about to lose out to Uzi Landau, the minister he sat at the far end of the cabinet table.

The polls predict a defeat but Sharon, it must be remembered, is Mr. Comeback.... [Still], Sharon has made the mistake which tripped up the greatest commanders in history -- underestimating the enemy.... Sharon's close aides are still hoping for a last-minute win, if only with a tiny majority.... But even then it is clear that Sharon's leadership has suffered a painful blow, while Landau, who insisted on fighting him to the finish, will now have to be upgraded in the Likud ranks."

IV. "Tempest in a Tea Cup"

Former minister of foreign affairs and former minister of defense Moshe Arens wrote in Ha'aretz (April 30): "Will rejection of the [disengagement] plan by the Likud membership cause a rift with the U.S.? Such a suggestion completely underestimates the strength and solidity of the U.S.-Israel relationship -- a relationship based on common ideals, common values and common interests. Under no circumstances, and certainly not when facing a tough election, would the President of the U.S. be looking for a quarrel with Israel. Nor is the government likely to fall. The present government is the most stable government that Israel has had in a long time.... So Likudniks can go to the polls on May 2, unencumbered by irrelevant considerations, considering only the central question: is a unilateral withdrawal likely to encourage Palestinian terrorists? The answer seems obvious."

VI. "Foreseeable Consequences"

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (April 30): "What the last 42 months of Palestinian terror have shown is that regardless of the provocation, Israel will never garner international support for offensives against Palestinian terrorism. Sharon has promised that after the withdrawal, Israel will be able to sit in its truncated form for years. Yet this cannot be true. Arafat will continue causing chaos to prevent that from happening. As Arafat's foreign minister [sic] Farouk Kaddoumi said this week: 'Let the Gaza Strip be South Vietnam. We will use all available methods to liberate North Vietnam'.... Sharon's plan differs from Oslo in that it overtly calls for the destruction of Israeli communities. In so doing, it poses a danger to the vitality of Israeli society as a whole.... If a majority of Likud voters reject Sharon's plan, they will be working to save Israel from disaster. In spite of Sharon's statements to the contrary, those who oppose the plan on its merits are not extremists. They are merely people who have learned from the past."

VII. "Likud Majority Says 'No to Sharon'"

Nationalist Hatzofe editorialized (April 30): "Sharon is endeavoring to present a picture according to which President Bush is standing by his policy, as it were. Among other things, he offers remarks by the President of the U.S. that some of Bush's pronouncements will be brought to Congress for approval, turning them into [commitments] binding the [U.S.] Administration, regardless of who heads it.... One can only regret the fact that the Prime Minister, who only a year ago sided with the settlers, suddenly changed his mind and has now, for some reason, adopted the PLO's policy, acting to evacuate the Gaza Strip and parts of Judea and Samaria [the West Bank]. Let us hope that the results of the referendum, which is predicted to bring a majority to the opponents of the evacuation of settlers from the Strip, will find their expression in Sunday's vote, and that a great majority of registered Likud voters will say 'no' to Ariel Sharon."

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